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ABSTRACT

Communicative adaptability differs from both P. Backlund's and J. M. Wiemann's definitions of communicative competence by stressing the importance of the communicator's ability to perceive contextual constraints and to adapt his or her interaction goals and behavior accordingly. Communicative adaptability produces more satisfactory answers to the questions, Competent to whom? and Competent at what? than other views because it considers the qualitative nature of the interaction and the importance of communicator goals. To make the conception of communicative adaptability useful, it has been necessary to specify some of the salient aspects of a communication context and to explore its dimensional structure. Studies to create a Communicative Adaptability Scale (CAS) have led to the four most common dimensions: social experience, adaptability, emphatic ability, and rewarding impressions. Two criterion variables, self-esteem and communication apprehension were measured. Tests of CAS on both adults and students have produced generally consistent results. Current research is being conducted to extend and further verify the CAS, and future research should focus on the behaviors perceived as competent. (JL)

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COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE A QUESTION OF CONTEXT: IT DEPENDS . . .

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Several recent articles have summarized the conceptual issues regarding communicative competence (Larson, 1978; Wiemann, 1978; Wiemann & Backlund, 1980). Although differences exist between these various conceptual approaches, some similarities are apparent. The following discussion presents two divergent yet representative definitions of communicative competence. A definition of communicative adaptability is offered and compared to Backlund's (1978) and Wiemann's (1977) conceptualizations.

Conceptualizations of Communicative Competence

Backlund (1978) reviewed different conceptualizations and reported that the competence literature produced a consistent theme. Backlund (1978) defined communicative competence as "The ability to demonstrate a knowledge of the socially appropriate communicative behavior in a given situation" (p.26). The terms of this definition reflect some important themes in the competence literature.

Initially, "The ability to demonstrate" suggests that a component of communicative competence is skill oriented. The term "knowledge" indicates that competence involves a cognitive component as suggested by earlier linguistic approaches (Chomsky, 1965). "Socially appropriate communicative behavior" indicates that communicative competence is a socially judged phenomena, requiring adaptive social skills. The stipulation of "a given situation" refers to a consideration of the context in which an interaction occurs. Thus, communicative competence, as defined by Backlund (1978), requires the behavioral and cognitive skills to adapt to differing communicative contexts.

Wiemann (1977) stressed goal orientation and defined communicative competence as "The ability of an interactant to choose among available communicative behaviors in order that he may successfully accomplish his own interpersonal

goals during an encounter, while maintaining the face and line of his fellow interactants within the constraints of the situation" (p. 198). Wiemann's (1977) conceptualization differs from Backlund's (1978) by including goal attainment as a component of competence.

Wiemann's (1977) discussion acknowledged Goffman (1959) with the inclusion of "maintaining the face and line of his fellow interactants". Concern for the other makes competence a dyadic construct (Wiemann, 1977; 1978). Illustrating the dyadic nature of competence Wiemann (1977) stated that the interactants negotiate the self/situation definition(s) to one that is "The best possible" (p. 196) for both parties. As a result of this negotiation process the original goals of each individual may have been changed.

The inclusion of goal directed behavior marks a significant departure from Backlund's (1978) approach. Wiemann (1977) states "Competence, however, does not mean that the interactant is completely selfless, i.e., completely other oriented ... he is successful in accomplishing his own goals ..." (p.197). In addition, Wiemann (1977) claims that a communicator may persuade another to accept his/her definition of the self/situation and still be considered competent. For a person to be judged competent the definition she/he offers is " ... functional for the long-term maintenance of the social relationship" (p. 197).

This discussion illuminates several issues throughout the definition and delineation of communicative adaptability. Communicative adaptability is the ability to perceive socio-interpersonal relationships and adapt ones interaction goals and behaviors accordingly. To gain a better understanding of this conceptualization, its constituent parts are discussed below.

Communicative competence requires both cognitive and behavioral skills (Wiemann, 1977; 1978; Larson, 1978; Wiemann & Backlund, 1980). Communicative

adaptability requires an individual to be able to perceive (cognitive function) and adapt (behavioral function) to differing contextual requirements. Further, these two functions are interdependent as evidenced by the disclosure flexibility construct (Chelune, 1977; Neimeyer, Banikiotes, and Winum, 1979). Neimeyer et al (1979) and Chelune (1977) reported that flexible self-disclosers are more perceptive of the social cues governing appropriateness. Chelune (1977) concluded his discussion by stating that self-disclosure flexibility may be a subset of a " ... more general pattern of awareness and adaptability that is related to effective interpersonal functioning" (p. 1143). Communicative adaptability is proposed as being that "more general pattern".

The inclusion of "socio-interpersonal requirements" acknowledges that communication cannot be evaluated without considering the context in which it occurs, and has been referenced by both Backlund (1978) and Wiemann (1978). Wiemann (1978) states that the competent communicator must be able to process "... the combined characteristics of the situation" (p.312). Those characteristics may include the physical environment, social audience, interpersonal relationship and purpose of the interaction (Wiemann, 1978; Wiemann & Backlund, 1980). The context places differing constraints on the interactants. The communicatively adaptable person is not only able to perceive the constraints placed upon him/herself, but also those that affect the other person's behavioral choices.

The ability to perceive the other person's contextual constraints enables the communicator to more accurately assess the other's communicative intent. Essentially the communicatively adaptable individual can perceive the contextual pressures influencing the others' choice of interaction behavior. Further, a person's own choice of behaviors are dependent upon the

choices of the other communicator. Therefore, accurate recognition of the other's behavioral intent should have a positive influence upon the outcome of the dyadic interaction.

The final and most distinctive feature of this conceptualization of communicative competence is the adaptation of one's interaction goals. This approach suggests that one's choice of goals for a specific interaction should be a function of and an influence upon one's communicative behaviors. The emphasis upon the adaptation of interaction goals to the socio-interpersonal relationships represents a different approach to the conceptualization of goal-orientation with regard to communicative competence.

Unlike Backlund's (1978) definition, Wiemann (1977; 1978) states that the competent communicator can attain his/her own goals and the needs of the other. While illustrating the dyadic nature of communicative competence, Wiemann (1977) noted that a person's original goals may differ from those at the conclusion of an encounter. Communicative competence, as conceptualized by Wiemann (1977), involves goal attainment and if necessary goal adaptation.

Goal adaptation, as presented by Wiemann (1977), is treated as a sufficient but not necessary communicative competency skill. Treating goal adaptation as a necessary skill focuses attention upon the cues and behaviors required to successfully adapt one's interaction goals to the requirements of the socio-interpersonal context.

Most conceptual discussions acknowledge that the competent communicator must be able to adapt his/her behaviors to the continuously changing communication contexts (Wiemann, 1977; 1978; Larson, 1978; Wiemann & Backlund, 1980). If a person must change his/her behaviors to accommodate different contextual demands then she/he must also readjust his/her goals. Further, if competence

is considered as residing in the dyad then goal negotiation is a fundamental concern. The extent to which goal adaptation is a necessary component of communicative competence is underscored by the number of times interactants come together with identical goals. Such a condition is a rare occurrence. Interactants may have similar goals but they rarely have identical purposes for communication. Therefore, communicative adaptability views goal adaptation not as a contingency but as an exingency.

In summary the salient aspects of communicative adaptability are presented: 1) Communicative adaptability requires both cognitive (ability to perceive) and behavioral (ability to adapt) skills; 2) Adaptation applies not only to behaviors but also interaction goals; 3) It is maintained that the competent communicator must be able to perceive and adapt to the requirements posed by different communication contexts; and 4) Communicative competence is assumed to reside in the dyad.

Issues of Communicative Competence

To clarify the conceptualization of communicative adaptability it is compared with the previously discussed approaches. All three perspectives view communicative competence as requiring cognitive and behavioral skills (Backlund, 1978, Wiemann, 1977; 1978). Another similarity is the consideration of the importance of the context in which an interaction takes place (Larson, 1978; Wiemann, 1978).

The differences and similarity of these orientations can best be illuminated by the answers to two questions: Competent to whom? and Competant at what? Answering the former question, Wiemann's (1977) definition places judgement of competence within the dyad. The communicator achieves his/her goal(s) while maintaining the face and line of the other.

Both people are concerned with themselves as well as the other. Backlund's (1978) definition also claims to be dyadic. This definition, however, makes competence an other oriented concept by relying solely upon the performance of socially (others) appropriate behavior. Since a goal orientation is omitted, one communicator is always reacting and not initiating communication for any self purpose. Communicative adaptability recognizes the communicator's personal goals and responsibility to the socio-interpersonal relationships. Communicative adaptability considers the concerns of self and others and leaves judgments of competence to the interactants.

The question of competent at what illustrates additional differences between these perspectives. Wiemann (1977) states competence is the 1) attainment of personal goals and 2) maintenance of the others self-definition. Although the needs of the other person are considered, primary concern is placed upon personal goal attainment. Wiemann (1977) notes that an interactant may have to modify his/her goals to the capabilities of the other. He also states that a competent person should make communicative choices on the basis of maintaining the relationship. With these considerations the focus of goal attainment still lies with one interactant's modifications.

Using Wiemann's conceptualization it is difficult to compare the competence of a person who has had to modify his/her goals with the competence of a person who has attained his/her goals without any modifications. Is the latter individual more or less communicatively competent than the former individual? Further, how does one judge the competency of a person who has not attained any of his/her goals but maintained the other's self/situational definitions? These difficulties are the result of making goal adaptation a secondary consideration.

In contrast, communicative adaptability views choice of interaction

goals as fundamental as appropriate behavioral performance. The competent communicator is able to perceive the contextual constraints placed upon him/herself and upon the other interactant. Further, she/he considers the impact of these constraints upon the behavioral choices and capabilities of the other. As a result of these perceptions the communicatively adaptable person selects goal(s) that are appropriate to the socio-interpersonal relationships.

Another difference between this and Wiemann's (1977) conceptualization involves an issue of ethics. Goal adaptation from Wiemann's perspective does not address the qualitative nature of the communicator's purposes. As long as a person preserves the dyadic relationship she/he can "get" whatever she/he wants. This approach would suggest that the highly Machiavellian individual is the most communicatively competent.

Communicative adaptability considers the qualitative aspect of a communicator's interaction purposes. Machiavellians would not always be labelled communicatively competent because their purpose for interaction is the attainment of personal rewards. Selection of communicative goals deals with appropriateness from an ethical standpoint. Does goal attainment serve a positive function for all interactants? This will almost always necessitate goal modification. Referring back to the questions posed of Wiemann's (1977) definition, the most competent communicator is the one who is able to adapt his/her goals.

The second case dealt with a person who did not attain any of his/her goals but maintained the definition of the other. In this situation the interactant would be judged communicatively competent because she/he was able to totally depart from his/her goals. This situation demonstrates another advantage of considering goal adaptation an exingency rather than a contingency.

The achievement of one's goals is a temporal issue from Wiemann's (1977) approach. To make an assessment of one's competency, a person must consider the communicator's original vs achieved goals. From the perspective of communicative adaptability, goal attainment is considered a process and not a product. Thus, there is little need for considering the change in a person's original communication goals except to observe the process by which the communicators negotiated their goals.

"Competant at what?" as addressed by Backlund (1978) is the ability to adapt to the requirements prescribed by the social situation. This definition stresses the ability to perceive and adapt to a social situation. The communicator's goals for interaction are not considered.

The issue of effectiveness vs competence although interesting may be overly "academic". Larson (1978) states "Functional communication effectiveness involves enhancing or facilitating certain outcomes" (p. 309). He goes on to say that these outcomes may vary from transmitting information to relational escalaction. It appears that this is an issue of degree of one's goals/outcomes and not the existence of such goals. Backlund's (1978) conceptualization of competence has an implicit goal of social adaptation and to this extent becomes the rubrics of interpersonal effectivess - how well one can adapt to different social requirements. Although these conceptualizations differentially stress goal orientation to the extent there is any reference to the self or other, goal attainment is an implicit component of communicative competence.

The final issue concerning this reconceptualization regards the dimensional structure of communicative adaptability. Larson (1978) claims that a problem arises when researchers attempt to assess the competence of adult samples. "As we got older, the relevant aspects of communicative

competence broaden, the contexts become more diverse. The items needed to sample an aspect of competence are more varied ..." (p.307). Any definition that contends communicative competence involves the "ability to adapt" is faced with a problem of identifying the perceived dimensions.

Different contexts should require different skills. For example, wit is an effective means of diffusing tension and as such is perceived as a valuable asset in initial or otherwise anxiety provoking situations. However, excessive or inappropriate humor between lovers may be perceived as an avoidance strategy and not a competent response. What is necessary is to specify some of the salient aspects of a communicational context and explore its dimensional structure.

This approach to the measurement of communicative competence may produce from two to n competence instruments. Some dimensions may be perceived in all the salient contexts while other dimensions may only be appropriate to one communication situation. Examples of salient contextual variables are the nature of the relationship between the communicators; the purpose for the encounter (business or pleasure); the setting (bar or church), etc. The identification of relevant contextual variables and the behaviors necessary to adapt and competently interact within these situations are the challenges facing competence researchers.

As a result of the above discussion the present operationalization of communicative adaptability is designed to identify the skills necessary to be perceived as competent in social situations, conversing with people ranging from strangers to friends. The following discussion focuses upon the development of the dimensional structure of the CAS.

Communicative Adaptability Scale

The conceptualization and operationalization of communicative adaptability

has evolved over three years and numerous investigations. Initially over 20 empirical studies were reviewed producing 32 distinct dimensions of communicative competence (Duran and Wheeless, 1980). The dimensions were reduced to those most commonly mentioned; social experience, adaptability, empathic ability, and rewarding impression. Principal axis factor analysis produced two factors, consisting of ten items each, accounting for 41% common variance. The first factor was labelled social experience and had a reliability of .88. The second factor was a combination of empathic ability and rewarding impression was labelled social confirmation with a reliability of .87.

Two criterion variables, self esteem and communication apprehension, were measured. It was believed that the higher one's feelings of worth (self esteem), the more social, sensitive, and adaptable (components of communicative competence) one would be. Significant correlations were found between social experience and self esteem ($r=.50$, $p<.001$) and social confirmation and self esteem ($r=.15$, $p<.001$). Self esteem was most highly related to the desire and ability to engage in numerous and diverse social encounters.

Communication apprehension has been defined as a "broad-based personality type characteristic that has a major impact on an individual's communication behavior (McCroskey, Daly, and Sorenson, 1976, p. 378). Communicative apprehensives "avoid communication if possible, or suffer from a variety of anxiety-type feelings when forced to communicate" (McCroskey et al., 1976, p. 376). Intuitively, one who is highly apprehesnive should not perceive him/herself as communicatively competent. Social experience and social confirmation were significantly related to communication apprehension (-.56 and -.20, $p<.001$), respectively).

As another test of criterion related validity the relationship between communicative adaptability and psychological gender orientation (Wheeless

and Duran, 1980) was studied. The Communicative Adaptability Scale (CAS) produced two dimensions accounting for 40% common variance: Reliabilities were .85 for social experience and .87 for social confirmation. Masculinity was significantly related to social experience ($r=.44$, $p<.001$) and slightly correlated with social confirmation ($r=.07$, $p<.04$). Psychological feminity was significantly related to social experience ($r=.36$, $p<.001$) and to social confirmation ($r=.55$, $p<.001$). These results were consistent with previous conceptualizations of gender orientation. Masculinity was most highly related to social experience which reflects instrumentality, control, and dominance. Feminity was related most strongly to social confirmation which deals with characteristics of expressiveness and sensitivity.

The relationship between loneliness and communicative adaptability was also investigated (Zakahi, and Duran, 1981). A lack of social skills has been one explanation for loneliness (Jones, in press). Lonely individuals were found to be less empathic in various social settings (Jones, 1978). Further, the lonely person reported having fewer social activities and experiences (Jones, in press). It was proposed that loneliness may in part be a result of a lack of communicative competence skills.

Factor analysis of the CAS produced a two factor solution accounting for 37% of common variance. Reliabilities were .87 for social experience, and .76 for social confirmation. Significant relationships were found for the two dimensions of communicative adaptability and two dimensions of loneliness (intimate others and social network). Social experience was significantly correlated with intimate others and social network ($r=.33$ and $r=.52$, $p<.01$, respectively). Social confirmation was related to intimate others ($r=.38$, $p<.01$) and social network ($r=.36$, $p<.01$). These results were also consistent. Social experience which taps one's ability to engage in new social situations

was most highly related to one's social network. Social confirmation which reflects a person's ability to make another individual feel positive about a communication encounter was significantly related to intimate others. Simply, those scoring higher on the CAS were found to be less lonely.

Extending the content validity and the reliability of the CAS across samples, the dimensional structure of communicative adaptability was expanded and tested with adult and student samples (Duran, Zakahi, and Parrish, 1981). An expert survey (Kerlinger, 1973) was performed and resulted in the construction of four additional dimensions; social composure, wit, appropriate disclosure, and articulation. The CAS was administered to 162 primary and secondary teachers and 697 college students. To assess the stability of the measure CAS was examined with two previously researched variables, self esteem and communication apprehension.

The adult sample produced a five factor solution accounting for 55% of the variance. Reliabilities were: social confirmation, .89; articulation, .83; social experience/composure, .82; wit, .72; and appropriate disclosure .70. A canonical correlation (Rc) between communicative adaptability dimensions and a linear composite of self esteem and communication apprehension resulted in an Rc of .72 (X^2=119.70; d.f.=10, $p<.001$). The communicative adaptability variate was defined by social composure/adaptability (.97). The second variate (self esteem and communication apprehension) was defined by communication apprehension (.95).

The student sample resulted in six factors accounting for 48% of the variance. Reliabilities were: social confirmation, .85; social composure, .78; articulation, .77; social experience, .76; wit, .72; and appropriate disclosure, .71. A canonical correlation similar to that observed with the adult sample resulted. An Rc of .74 (X^2=567.24; d.f.=12; $p<.001$) was found between communica-

tive adaptability (defined by social composure, loading =.94) and a composite of self esteem and communication apprehension (defined by communication apprehension, loading =.98).

The results of the factor analyses and canonical correlations of the two samples were extremely supportive of the reliability and validity of the CAS. A substantial amount of variance was accounted for by the CAS ranging from 48% to 55%. With the exception of social experience and social composure, the factor structures of the two samples were consistent. The canonical correlations generated similar Rc's and canonical loadings. It was recommended, for reasons of conceptual clarity, that communicative adaptability be operationalized by the six factor, 30 item CAS.

Currently research is being conducted to: 1) extend criterion-related validity by examining self and other reports of communicative adaptability; 2) examine construct validity by testing the relationship between communicative adaptability and communication satisfaction; and 3) compare communicator style with communicative adaptability as they related to communication satisfaction. Preliminary results indicate a stable factor structure (50% of the variance) and moderate reliabilities (.71-.84).

Future research should focus upon the behaviors perceived as competent. This can be aided by studying the relationships between self-reports and observers' ratings of competence. The Communicative Adaptability Scale can be compared with a nonverbal measure of communication competence (Wiemann, 1977). The relationship between self-reported competence (as measured by the CAS) and observed competence (as measured by Communicative Competence) can be compared. This would indicate the degree of correspondence between self-reports and actual behaviors of communicative competence, thus providing information about the external validity of the Communicative Adaptability Scale.

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